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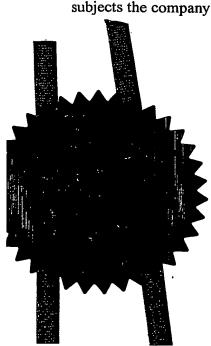
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If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

United Kingdom

Title of the invention

Seal Assembly .

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

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Murgitroyd & Company

Scolland House 165-169 Scotland Street Glasgow

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Claim(s)

5

Abstract

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Patents Form 1/77

1

Seal Assembly

1

2	pipelines used for transporting fluids such as oil
3	and gas. In particular it relates to a seal
4	assembly for use in sealing an annular space between
5	an inner pipe and an outer pipe in such a double-
6	walled pipeline.
. 7	
8	Pipelines carrying heavy or crude oil need to be
9,	thermally insulated as heavy oil tends to solidify
10	during transport from a subsea production well to
11	the surface due to heat losses in the submerged
12	pipeline. Thermal insulation is also required to
13	avoid the formation of hydrates which can occur for
14	certain crude oil compositions when the crude oil
15	cools down, for example, when there is a breakdown
16	in production flow rate.
17	
18	Production lines which require a high level of
19	thermal insulation typically use a double-walled
20	pipe structure, for example a pipe-in-pipe system.
21	A pipe-in-pipe system comprises an internal pipe
22	within an external pipe separated by an annulus

The present invention relates to double-walled

In such a structure, the annular space can volume. 1 2 be filled with thermal insulation material. structure has the advantage that the external pipe 4 keeps the annular space dry and so, for example, in subsea pipelines, the thermal insulation material is 5 protected from water. A further advantage of this 6 7 structure is that the pressure in the annulus can be different from that outside the external pipe and 8 . 9 that inside the internal pipe. This is important if 10 the insulating material has a particular pressure 11 requirement or if a vacuum or partial vacuum is to 12 be used for insulating purposes. For example, the 13 annulus can be at atmospheric pressure while the hydrostatic pressure experienced by the external (or 14 1.5 carrier) pipe and the internal pressure of the fluid in the internal pipe (flowline) are different. 16 17 Furthermore it is interesting to lower the pressure 18 in the annulus in order to increase the thermal 19 insulation performance. 20 One of the problems associated with such pipelines 21 is that of safeguarding the annular space against 22 23 the ingress of water, for example due to leaks in 24 the external or carrier pipe. Water in the annular space will conduct heat from the inner flowline to 25 26 the carrier pipe thus destroying the effectiveness of the insulation. This problem has been approached 27 28 in prior art pipe-in-pipe systems by compartmentalising the annular space by means of 29 permanent seals (GB 2 317 934, US 2 930 407, WO 30 00/09926). It is desirable, in some cases, to have 31 32 a vacuum or partial vacuum in the annular space.

When the annular space is compartmentalised by 1 permanent seals, the vacuum or partial vacuum in the 2 annular space must be created during the manufacture 3 of the double walled pipe. Once manufactured, it is then not possible to vary the pressure within the compartments, for example, so as to maintain the 6 required pressure throughout the lifetime of the 7 8 An ability to vary this pressure would be useful, for example, in the case of diffusion of 9 gases into the annulus through the internal or 10 external pipes or a leak which modifies the pressure 11 within the compartment and alters the thermal 12 13 insulation capabilities of the pipeline. remains a need for a pipeline for which the pressure 14 within the annular space can be controlled during 15 the lifetime of the pipeline and a pipeline for 16 which the annular space can be separated into 17 compartments in the case of a leak of water or 18 hydrocarbon fluids into the pipeline, thus 19 20 preventing flooding of the whole annular space. The above problems are solved by the seal assembly 21 22 of the present invention. 23 In accordance with the invention there is provided a 24 seal assembly for sealing an annular space between 25 an inner and an outer pipe in a double-walled subsea 26 pipeline which seal assembly under normal operating 27 conditions is in a non-sealing position which allows 28 the passage of a gas through said seal assembly and 29 which seal assembly is actuatable from a non-sealing 30 position to a sealing position in response to the 31 32 entry of liquid into said annular space.

1	•
2	Preferably the seal assembly in its non-sealing
3	position provides an opening in the annular space t
4	allow the passage of a gas through the seal
5	assembly. Preferably the seal assembly comprises a
6	annular member and moveable blocking means such that
. 7	entry of liquid into said annular space causes
8	movement of said blocking means to close said
9	opening.
10	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
11	Preferably the blocking means is moveable under
12	pressure of liquid flow or the seal assembly -
13	comprises a liquid-sensitive material and the
14	blocking means is moveable as a result of
15	interaction of the liquid with said liquid-sensitiv
16	material.
17	and the second of the second o
18	Embodiments of the invention will now be described,
19	by way of example only, with reference to the
20	accompanying drawings in which:
21	
22	Figure 1a is a cross-sectional view of a seal
23	assembly according to a first aspect of the present
24	invention.
25	
26	Figures 1b and 1c are cross-sectional views of a
27	seal assembly according to a first aspect of the
28	present invention in non-sealing and sealing
29	positions respectively.
30	
31	Figure 1d is a cross-sectional view of a closure
32	member and a plan view of a closure member.

1 2 Figure 1e is a cross-sectional view of a diaphragm 3 and a plan view of a diaphragm. 5 Figures 2a and 2b are perspective views of a valve б for insertion into a seal assembly according to the second aspect of the present invention. 7 8 2b, the valve is in its non-sealing position. 9 10 Figures 3a and 3b are cross-sectional views of a valve for insertion into a seal assembly according 11 12 to the second aspect of the present invention, in non-sealing and sealing positions respectively. 13 14 15 Figures 3c and 3d are cross-sectional views of a 16 valve for insertion into a seal assembly according to the second aspect of the present invention, in 17 non-sealing and sealing positions respectively. 18 19 20 Figures 4a to 4d are cross-sectional views of a seal 21 assembly according to the third aspect of the 22 present invention. In Figures 4b and 4c, the seal 23 assembly is in a non-sealing position in the annular 24 space between an outer pipe and an inner pipe. 25 Referring now to the drawings Figure la shows a seal 26 27 . . assembly according to a first aspect of the present 28 invention. In the first aspect of the present 29 invention the annular member (1) comprises one or 30 more orifices (5) and the moveable blocking means comprises a diaphragm (2) and a closure member (4) 31 32 such that flow of liquid in said annular space

causes movement of the diaphragm which causes 1 movement of the closure member to close said one or 2 more orifices. 3 4 Preferably the annular member is capable of 5 extending from the inner wall of the outer pipe to 6 7 the outer wall of the inner pipe and of being in sealing contact with each of said inner and outer 8 walls. By sealing contact is meant that the passage of gas or liquid through the contact interface is 10 not possible. This is achieved by the appropriate 11 dimensioning of the annular member. Figures 1b and 12 lc show the annular member in sealing contact with 13 each of the inner and outer walls of the annular 14 . space in a pipe-in-pipe structure. Preferably the 15 annular member is made from a rubber material or an 16 elastomeric material, for example polyurethane. The 17 annular member may comprise a steel insert (4) for 18 19 strengthening/rigidity purposes. 20 Preferably the annular member has a longitudinal end 21 22 face which is recessed i.e., it has a concave cross-23 section defining upper and lower arms. Upper and lower relate to the larger circumference and the 24 smaller circumference sides which define the end. 25 face of the annular member, respectively. 26 Preferably, the larger diameter of the recessed end 27 face is larger than that of the outer pipe and the 28 smaller diameter of the recessed end face is smaller 29 that that of the inner pipe of the pipe-in-pipe 30 structure in which the annular member is to be used. 31 This is so that in order to fit into the annular 32

1 space, the annular member must be compressed at the 2 recessed end. Once inserted into the annular space. the recessed end will try to expand, thus wedging 3 the annular member in place. 6 Figure 1b shows a cross-section of the above seal 7 assembly in an annular space between inner and outer 8 pipes in a non-sealing position. In this nonsealing position, gas can pass through the seal 9 10 assembly via apertures (6,7) in the diaphragm, via a 11 gap between the annular member and the closure member and via orifice (5) in the annular member. 12 13 The annular member may have one or more orifices; 14 the number and size of which will depend on 15 application parameters, for example, the dimensions 16 of the inner and outer pipes, the repartition of the waterstops along the pipeline, the length of the 17 pipekine, the sensitivity of the moveable blocking 18 19 means. 20 21 In this embodiment, both the diaphragm and the 22 closure member are moveable. Preferably the closure 23 member is annular in shape as can be seen from the 24 embodiment shown in Figure 1d. In the embodiment 25 where the annular member has a longitudinal end face 26 which comprises a concave cross-section defining 27 upper and lower arms, the closure member may be 28 attached by resilient means to one of the upper and lower arms of the annular member. Preferably there 29 is a gap between the closure member and the other 30 31 arm of the annular member to allow flow of gas past the closure member when the seal assembly is in a 32

1 non-sealing position. The closure member may 2 comprise protrusions (8) positioned on the closure member so that they correspond in position to the 3 4 one or more orifices in the annular member that they 5 are intended to plug. The protrusions are shaped so 6 that when pressed against an orifice they will form 7. an effective seal. 8 9 Preferably the diaphragm is annular in shape as can be seen from the embodiment shown in Figure 1e. 10 the embodiment where the annular member has a 11 longitudinal end face which comprises a concave 12. 13 cross-section defining upper and lower arms, the 14 diaphragm may extend between the upper and lower 15 arms of the annular member and comprise apertures to 16 allow flow of gas through the diaphragm when the 17 seal assembly is in a non-sealing position. The diaphragm may be buckled in shape to increase the 18 19 efficiency of its function as shown in Figure 1e. 20 21 Preferably both the diaphragm and the closure member 22 are annular in shape. In a preferred embodiment, 23 the annular member has a longitudinal end face which 24 comprises a concave cross-section defining upper and 25 lower arms; the closure member is attached by resilient means to one of said upper and lower arms; 26 and the diaphragm extends between said upper and 27 28 lower arms. 29 30 Under normal operating conditions, i.e., when the pipeline is not leaking and there is no ingress of 31 32 liquid into the annular space, the seal assembly is

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Ţ	in its non-seating position. Should liquid leak		
2	into the annular space, the flow of liquid in the		
3	annular space causes movement of the diaphragm which		
4	causes movement of the closure member, which in turn		
5	closes the one or more orifices. Preferably the		
б	pressure of the liquid acts directly on the		
7	diaphragm causing the diaphragm to press against the		
. 8	closure member causing the closure member to move		
. 9	into a position where it closes the one or more		
10	orifices. The apertures in the diaphragm are closed		
11	on contact with the closure member. The seal		
12	assembly in its sealing position is shown in Figure		
13	1c. The direction of liquid flow is indicated by the		
14	arrows. In this first aspect of the invention, the		
· 15	liquid must flow towards the diaphragm to actuate		
16	the seal assembly from a non-sealing position to a		
17	sealing position.		
18			
19	In a second aspect of the present invention the		
20	annular member comprises one or more valves and said		
21	valves each comprise one or more orifices and		
22	moveable blocking means such that the flow of liquid		
23	in said annular space causes movement of the		
24	moveable blocking means to close said one or more		
25	orifices.		
26			
27	A valve comprises one or more orifices and moveable		
28	blocking means. Figures 2 and 3 show embodiments of		
29	valves according to this aspect of the invention.		
30	The valve may comprise a housing which has one or		
31	more orifices and which houses the moveable blocking		
32	means. The valve may also be connected to tubing or		

The tubing or hosing may form an integral hosing. 1 The valve may be situated part of the housing. 2 within the tubing or hosing. The one or more valves 3 may be attached to or form part of the annular 4 Preferably the valve (and, if present, 5 tubing) is insertable into the annular member. 6 Preferably the annular member comprises one or more 7 tubes in which tubes the one or more valves are 8 situated. 9 10 In this second aspect of the invention the valve may 11 be located on either face of the annular member. 12 i.e., either on the face that confronts the flow of 13 liquid or on the opposite face. 14 15 Figure 2a shows a valve (9) and tubing (10) 16 arrangement that can be inserted into the annular 17 In this embodiment of the second aspect of 18 the present invention a valve comprises a blocking 19 plate (16) with an orifice and the moveable blocking 20 means comprises a diaphragm (14) and a closure 21 member (12) which closure member has apertures (15) 22 such that flow of liquid in the amular space causes 23 movement of the diaphragm which causes movement of 24 the closure member against the blocking plate 25 closing the orifice in the blocking plate and the 26 apertures in the closure member. The valve 27 comprises a housing (11) in the shape of a truncated 28 cone and this may be located at the end of tubing. 29 A membrane or diaphragm that is permeable to gas but 30 not liquid covers the end of the housing having the 31 larger diameter. The end of the housing having the 32

smaller diameter (the nose) of the housing is formed 1 by a blocking plate or ring (16) which has an 2 orifice in it. In this embodiment the closure member 3 comprises a plug having the shape of a truncated 4 cone (13) which fits in a sleeve-like fashion into 5 the housing. The nose of the plug has crifices in 6 it. A retaining nut (17) holds the conical plug in 7 place inside the housing in a preloaded position so 8 that the nose of the plug is at a distance from the 9 blocking plate or ring. This is the non-sealing 10 position and is shown in Figure 2b. When there is 11 sufficient pressure of liquid on the membrane, the 12 membrane will push on the conical plug so that it 13 comes into contact with blocking plate and closes 14 15 off the orifices. 16 Preferably the diaphragm is made of Gortex 17 (trademark) and preferably the rest of the moveable 18 means is made of a rubber type material. Silicone 19 grease may be used during assembly on all sliding 20 21 faces. 22 In this embodiment the valve may be located on 23 either face of the annular member, i.e., either on 24 the face that confronts the flow of liquid or on the 25 opposite face. In either location the direction of 26 the flow of liquid should be such that it confronts 27 the diaphragm before the blocking plate. 28 29 Figure 3 shows two further embodiments of a valve 30 according to the second aspect of the present 31 In these embodiments the moveable 32 invention.

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1 blocking means comprises biased means attached to a 2 closure member which biased means is held in a 3 biased position by means of a liquid-sensitive 4 material such that the presence of liquid in said 5 annular space causes interaction of said liquid with б said liquid-sensitive material causing said liquid-7 sensitive material to release the biased means so 8 that said biased means effects movement of the closure member to close said one or more orifices. 9 10 Figure 3a shows valve (18) in a non-sealing position 11 12 which comprises housing (19); orifices (20, 21) and 13 tubing (22). In this embodiment the valve housing 14 is in the shape of truncated tubing and has orifices 15 in the side walls as is shown in Figures 3a and b. 16 The moveable blocking means comprises blased means 17 (23) attached to a closure member (24). The biased 18 means may be either a compression or a tension 19 spring, preferably the biased means is a tension 20 spring. The biased means is held in a biased 21 position, for example a spring held in a compressed 22 state, by means of liquid-sensitive material (25). 23 Interaction with liquid in the annular space causes the liquid-sensitive material to react or dissolve 24 25 thus releasing the biased means. Release of the 26 biased means causes movement of the closure member 27 into a position where it closes off the one or more 28 orifices in the valve head. The valve in its 29 sealing or closed-off position is shown in Figure 3b. Preferably, in this embodiment the valve is 30 31 located on the face of the annular member that 32 confronts the flow of liquid.

1 Figures 3c and d show a further embodiment of a 2 valve for insertion into a seal assembly according 3 to the present invention, in non-sealing and sealing 4 positions respectively. Figure 3c shows valve (18) 5 which comprises housing (19), orifices (20, 21) and 6 The moveable means comprises a biased 7 tubing (22). spring (23) and closure member (24). The spring is 8 held in a compressed state by means of a retaining 9 wire (26) which is restrained in position by a 10 liquid-sensitive material (25). When liquid enters 11. the annulus the liquid sensitive material will react 12 or dissolve on contact with the liquid, releasing 13 the retaining wire and simultaneously releasing the 14 spring. On release, the spring pushes closure 15 member (24) to close off the orifices (see Figure 16 . 17 3d). 18 19 Preferably the liquid-sensitive material is a salt that will dissolve or partially dissolve on contact 20 21 with the liquid or an absorbent material that will soften on contact with the liquid. 22 23 In a third aspect of the present invention the 24 annular member is dimensioned so that it will be in 25 sealing contact with only one of the inner wall of 26 the outer pipe and the outer wall of the inner pipe 27 and will provide an opening in said annular space 28 between the annular member and the wall with which 29 it is not in sealing contact and the moveable 30

blocking means comprises resilient means which is

31

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1 deformable under the pressure of liquid flow in the annular space to close said opening. 2 3 4 An embodiment according to this aspect of the 5 invention is shown in Figure 4. The seal assembly б of Figure 4 comprises an annular member (27) and moveable blocking means (28). Figures 4a and 4b 7 В show the seal assembly in a non-sealing position in a pipe-in-pipe structure. The annular member is 9 capable of being in sealing contact with only one of 10 11 the inner wall of the outer pipe (31) and the outer wall of the inner pipe (32) thus providing an 12 13 opening (33) in said annular space (30) between the 14 annular member and the wall with which it is not in 15 This is achieved by the sealing contact. appropriate dimensioning of the annular member. 16 17 Preferably the annular member is capable of being in sealing contact with only the outer wall of the 18 19 inner pipe. 20 In this aspect of the invention the moveable member 21 comprises resilient means which is deformable under 22 the pressure of liquid flow. The moveable member 23 24 may be a lip on the annular member. Preferably the annular member and the moveable member are made from 26 the same material. Preferably the annular member has a longitudinal end face which comprises a 28 concave cross-section defining (or has a recess which defines) upper (28) and lower (34) arms and 30 one of these arms is the resilient means deformable 31 under the pressure of liquid flow in the annular 32 space. Upper and lower relate to the larger

25

27

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23

24

25 26

27

28

29 30

31

circumference and the smaller circumference sides 1 which define the end face, respectively. Preferably 2 the lower arm is in sealing contact with the upper 3 wall of the inner pipe. 4 In this embodiment the upper arm is the resilient means moveable under the 5 pressure of liquid flow. 6 7 8 Preferably, the larger diameter of the end face is larger than that of the outer pipe and the smaller 9 10 diameter of the end face is smaller that that of the .11 inner pipe of the pipe-in-pipe arrangement in which 12 the annular member is to be used. This is so that 13 in order to fit into the annular space, the annular member must be clamped closed and held in this 14 15 position by an annular restraining means (35). annular restraining means has a complementary shape 16 17 to the concave recess in the end face of the annular member. Preferably the annular restraining means is 18 19 bonded (36, 37) to the lower and upper arms respectively of the annular member, thus restraining 20 them from moving apart. This bond may be made by a 21 22 water-soluble glue/adhesive. In this third aspect of the invention the longitudinal end face having a recess confronts the flow of liquid. In operation, flow of liquid will exert force on this end face. The most vulnerable component of the seal assembly to this force is the upper arm (moveable means) and when the force is sufficient to break the bond between it and the annular restraining means, the upper arm is pushed

against the inner wall of the upper pipe thus effecting a seal (see Figure 4c). 2 . 3 The present invention also provides a pipe system 4 comprising an inner pipe and an outer pipe and a 5 seal assembly selected from the seal assemblies 6 described herein. Preferably the seal assemblies 7 are installed in pairs in order to prevent the 8 passage of liquid in both directions. 9 The annular ...10 space in the pipe system may also comprise insulation material and/or one or more elements . 11 chosen from bulkheads to transfer loads (services or 12 handling loads) between the carrier pipe and the 13 flowline; spacers to centre the flowline within the 14 carrier pipe; buckle arrestors to prevent the 15 propagation of a buckle along the carrier pipe. 16 Preferably the seal assemblies are installed near to 17 buckle arrestors so that when buckle propagation is 18 stopped, any water leak due to the buckle will not 19 be allowed to proceed through the pipeline. 20

1		CLAIMS
2	.1.	A seal assembly for sealing an annular space
3		between an inner and an outer pipe in a double-
4		walled subsea pipeline which seal assembly:
5		(a) under normal operating conditions is in a
6		non-sealing position which allows the
7		passage of a gas through said seal
8		assembly; and
9		(b) is actuatable from a non-sealing position
10		to a sealing position in response to the
11		entry of liquid into said annular space.
12		
13	2.	A seal assembly according to claim 1 which
14		(a) in its non-sealing position provides an
15		opening in the annular space to allow the
16		passage of a gas through the seal
17		assembly; and
18		(b) comprises an annular member and moveable
19		blocking means such that entry of liquid
20		into said annular space causes movement of
21		said blocking means to close said opening.
22	•	
23	3.	A seal assembly according to claim 2 wherein
24	•	the blocking means is moveable under pressure
25		of liquid flow.
25		
27	4.	A seal assembly according to claim 2 which
28		comprises a liquid-sensitive material and
29		wherein the blocking means is moveable as a
30		result of interaction of the liquid with said
31		liquid-sensitive material.

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1	5.	A seal assembly according to claim 3 wherein
2		(a) the annular member comprises one or more
3		orifices; and
4		(b) the moveable blocking means comprises a
5		diaphragm and a closure member such that
б		flow of liquid in said annular space
7		causes movement of the diaphragm which
В		causes movement of the closure member to
9		close said one or more crifices.
10		
11	б	A seal assembly according to claim 5 wherein
12		the diaphragm and closure member are both
13		annular in shape.
14		
15	7	A seal assembly according to any one of claims
16		2 to 4 wherein:
17		(a) the annular member comprises one or more
18		valves; and
19		(b) said valves each comprising one or more
20		orifices and moveable blocking means such
21		that flow of liquid in said annular space
22		causes movement of the moveable blocking
23		means to close said one or more orifices.
24		•
25	8	A seal assembly according to claim 7 wherein a
26		valve comprises a blocking plate with an
27		orifice and the moveable blocking means
28		comprises a diaphragm and a closure member
29		which closure member has apertures such that
30		flow of liquid in the annular space causes
31		movement of the diaphragm which causes movement
32		of the closure member against the blocking

1		plate closing the orifice in the blocking plate
2		and the apertures in the closure member.
3		
4	9	A seal assembly according to claim 7 wherein
5		the moveable blocking means comprises biased
6		means attached to a closure member which biased
7		means is held in a biased position by means of
8		a liquid-sensitive material such that flow of
9		liquid in said annular space causes interaction
10		of said liquid with said liquid-sensitive
11		material causing said liquid-sensitive material
12		to release the biased means so that said biased
13		means effects movement of the closure member to
14		close said one or more orifices.
15		
16	10	A seal assembly according to claim 9 wherein
17		the biased means is a spring.
18		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
19	11	A seal assembly according to claim 9 or 10
20		wherein the liquid-sensitive material is a
21		water-soluble salt.
22		2
23	12	A seal assembly according to any one of claims
24		7 to 12 wherein the annular member comprises
25		one or more tubes in which tubes the one or
26		more valves are situated.
27		
28	13	A seal assembly according to any one of the
29		preceding claims wherein the annular member is
30		dimensioned so that it will extend from the
31		inner wall of the outer pipe to the outer wall
32		of the inner pipe and will be in sealing

. 1		contact with each of said inner and said outer
2		walls.
3		is the second of
4	1.4	A seal assembly according to any one of claims
5		1 to 3 wherein
6		(a) the annular member is dimensioned so that
7		it will be sealing contact with only one
8		of the inner wall of the outer pipe and
9		the outer wall of the inner pipe and will
10		provide an opening in said annular space
11		between the annular member, and the wall
12		with which it is not in sealing contact;
13		and
14		(b) the moveable blocking means comprises
15		resilient means which is deformable under
16		the pressure of liquid flow in the annular
17		space to close said opening.
18		
19	15	A seal assembly according to claim 14 wherein
20	•	the annular member has a longitudinal end face
21		which has a recess to define upper and lower
22		arms and one of these arms is the resilient
23		means deformable under the pressure of liquid
24		flow in the annular space to close said
25		opening.
26		
27	16	A seal assembly according to claim 13 or claim
28		14 which comprises annular restraining means
29		bonded to the upper and lower arms of the
30		annular member.
31		·

÷

1	17	A pipe system comprising an inner and an outer
2		pipe and a seal assembly according to any one
3		of the preceding claims.
4		
5	18	A valve suitable for use in the seal assembly
б		of any one of claims 7 to 12.
_		

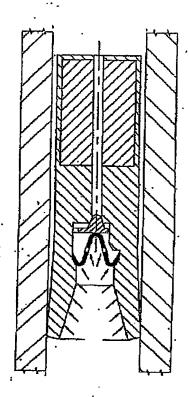


Figure 1

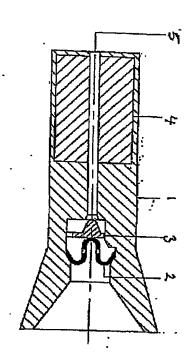
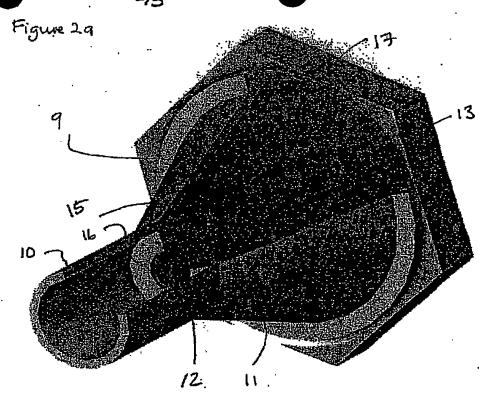


Figure 16

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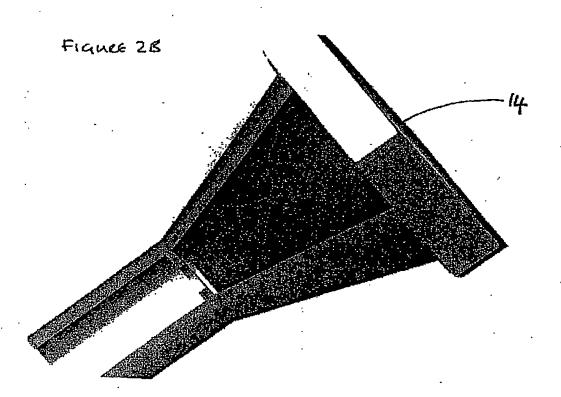


Figure 3c

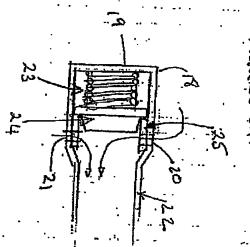


Figure 40

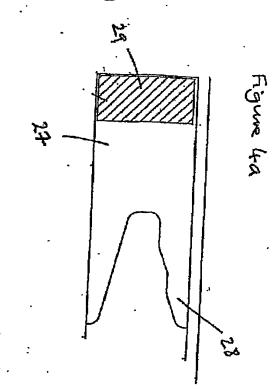
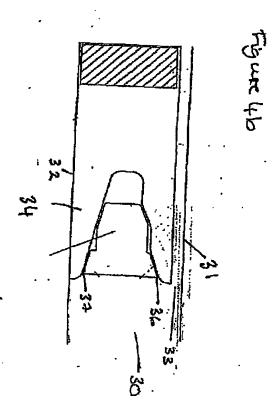


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